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COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

***Hearing on: Homeland Security Research and Development at the EPA:
Taking Stock and Looking Ahead***

Wednesday, May 19, 2004
2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Welcome to today's hearing on Homeland Security research and development at the Environmental Protection Agency (better known as EPA). One of our federal government's most fundamental duties is to protect our nation's citizens. Since September 11th, how we perform this duty has changed drastically because threats that we once found only in movies are now unmistakably real.

Perhaps the most significant change was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security to lead our national effort. But many other agencies, such as EPA, are also crucial to the success of our effort.

EPA is, in fact, the lead federal agency for protecting our nation's drinking and wastewater systems, and for decontaminating buildings that have been exposed to chemical or biological agents, such as anthrax. EPA's research programs help set standards, assess risks, develop methods for measuring contaminants, and test and deploy technologies for responding to chemical or biological events.

Today, we will examine these programs to learn how the EPA sets its priorities and coordinates its work with the Department of Homeland Security.

We will hear from experts from the National Academy of Sciences who reviewed EPA's water security and building decontamination research plans and made recommendations to improve these efforts.

We also want to understand why the President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposes to eliminate funding for EPA's building decontamination program. This seems particularly troubling given the EPA's designation as the lead federal agency for building decontamination.

Finally, we are concerned that EPA plans to close its Homeland Security Research Center at the end of Fiscal Year 2005. The center was created in 2002 to coordinate and conduct EPA's homeland security-related research. Closing it so soon, when so many research questions remain unanswered, makes no sense to me. It also raises the larger question of who will carry out and coordinate this vital research, if EPA closes this center.

I look forward to the testimony and hope we can answer these important questions.